

Good afternoon Mayor Meed-Ward, Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Lydia Thomas and I live on Filman place in Aldershot Burlington. I am recently retired and am going to speak from the perspective of a senior Burlington resident.

I love Burlington, the location, the parks, the people- ALL the people, including those less fortunate. Over the last 2 years, I have sadly seen an increase in homeless people on corners looking for help from the community. Twice in the last 6 months, I have personally witnessed homeless theft at Mapleview Mall, with people running out of the mall with coats, shirts and even cleaning supplies in their arms. It is heartbreaking and something I have not seen in this lifetime. We are failing them.

Did you know that from 2019 to 2022, the Burlington Food Bank has seen a staggering 94% increase in total visits? That is almost double over the last 4 years. And if that does not shock and motivate us to do better, let's look at benchmarks published by the Food Bank - this 94% Burlington increase in Food bank visits is more than double that of Ontario (43%) and almost triple that of Canada (35%).

And unlike other cities, the Burlington Food bank isn't just supplying food to pocket communities with food insecurities or specific neighbourhoods that are considered poorer than average. No, according to our food bank, Burlington is unique - because our poverty is well hidden and it is found in EVERY demographic. It is every age, every ethnicity, virtually every neighbourhood and every gender and it is caused by financial instability.

Seniors are one of our most vulnerable groups that need support and our highest consideration and we are failing them. In 2022, there was a 312% increase in seniors visits to the Burlington Food Bank compared to 2018. Seniors are a group in our community whose income doesn't change very often, but their living costs have continued to climb. They are forced to tap into resources that they hadn't planned to use or look to sources of money that they should not be accessing. On paper they may look fine but they are struggling and an invisible casualty because their income resources are being slowly tapped out. These tax increases are debilitating for them and could land them on our streets.

My family is one of the lucky ones- we have a beautiful home and enough food such that we do not need to visit the Food Bank. But we are a senior's family facing the same challenges. Our income has remained the same while costs have gone dramatically up. Our retirement plan that we meticulously laid out is out the window. Why ? Because we did not plan for mortgage rates to go up so quickly. We did not plan for food prices to go through the roof despite our efforts to shop at boxed stores and shop the flyers. We did not plan for utility costs to skyrocket despite our best efforts to cut our daily usage. We did not plan for gas prices to go up so quickly forcing us to make do with 1 car. We did not plan for our savings and investments to be eroded due to a slumping economy. And we certainly did not expect the city to kick us when we are down by increasing our property taxes over 7% last year.

And the solution is not to subsidize low income seniors. Because ALL seniors are struggling. ALL seniors have a fixed income while costs have skyrocketed meaning they can't maintain their standard of living. All seniors need help controlling cost increases.

A friend in Oakville was shocked when I mentioned our tax increases in Burlington. Last year his Oakville tax increase was 1.5% and 3.8% this year. Based on those Oakville figures, last year's 7% City of Burlington increase should cover us off with no increases for the next 3 years.

Instead, you are doubling down with another similar increase over 7% this year. Really? Is this the best that the City Council can do for the citizens of Burlington? We the residents of Burlington did not sign up for this. We cannot live like this. We deserve better. We love Burlington but we don't love being forced from our now unaffordable homes. We don't love being forced to make unplanned decisions to uproot our families from the communities and schools and friends we love, to move to a cheaper part of the city or out of the city altogether.

Please prove to us that those that are struggling are not invisible and that you care.
Hold every new spend or inefficiency up against the face of homelessness and the face of those people heading to the Food Bank lines. Visit these people, take a picture and post it on your office wall. Find another way.

Find a way to self fund projects by: cutting costs, eliminating redundant jobs, finding and correcting inefficiencies, cutting process steps, setting a hiring freeze, negotiating contracted cost reductions, and maintaining rather than increasing salaries particularly for those that are earning over \$100 000.
Utilize volunteers and good corporate citizens.
Commit to a Zero tax rate increase for 2024.

Find the way or we will surely be seeing more homeless people on the streets and more neighbours and seniors visiting the Food Bank.

Is this really the vision that you have for Burlington?

Is this really the best that you, our elected officials can do for us?

Thank-you.